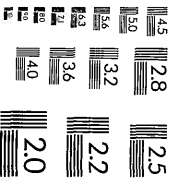


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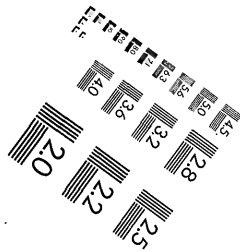
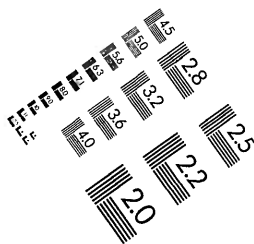


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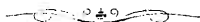
A PAPER,

READ BEFORE THE PRESBYTERIAN MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION, OF CIN-  
CINNATI, MARCH 29, 1875,

BY

THOMAS H. SKINNER,

*Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church.*



CINCINNATI:

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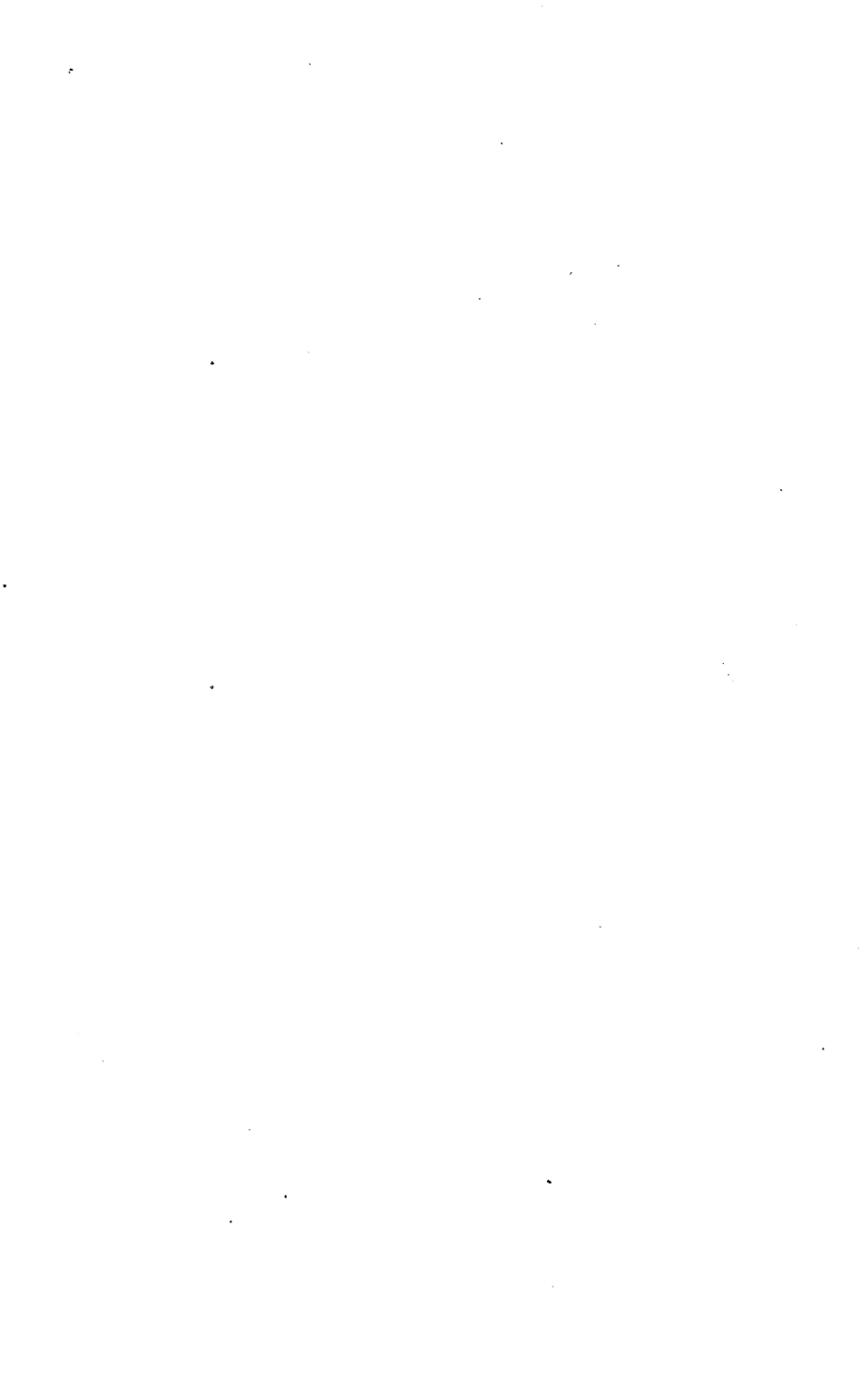
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## P R E F A C E .

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As a minister of the Presbyterian Church, to which he has pledged his solemn vow for the maintenance of her "peace, unity and purity," the writer records in the following pages his profound and earnest convictions on the subject of which he treats. In the midst of the passing excitement, he does not expect from most persons a calm and dispassionate hearing. But, in justice to the standards of the church to which he belongs, and to the decisions of her highest court, he herewith gives his testimony, waiting for other times to vindicate the rectitude of his position.

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## LAY EVANGELISM.

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The subject this afternoon is Lay Evangelism, the preaching of unlicensed, unordained members of the church. I approach it with pain and grief; first, because I must seem to some of my brethren to be resisting a good work, even the work of the Holy Spirit; and, secondly, because of the *necessity* that exists for its plain and honest consideration.

The Presbyterian Church appears to me to be threatened with a very great and fundamental revolution. It might be deemed offensive should I state the grounds of my conviction; that it should be so deemed, is one of the saddest proofs of the fact, as it appears to my mind.

We are now confronted with *lay preaching*. Unordained men are going forth from their churches, expounding the word of God to Christians, addressing audiences just as do the ordained ministry from platforms and pulpits, taking texts and delivering sermons, and in some instances administering the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and this with the sanction and approval of ministers of the Presbyterian Church, directly in the face of most specific and positive decisions and deliverances of our General Assemblies.

These acts of these laymen are, confessedly, the precise and formal and official acts of pastors of churches. They constitute the very objects for which the ministry of reconciliation was divinely instituted, and to which ministers are called, and then tested, approved, ordained, and commissioned. The two classes, however, are very

different, and the difference amounts to two distinct orders of Christian ministers, the responsible and the irresponsible.

Lay preachers are no new thing in church history. They have often appeared in the field, and hitherto, notwithstanding their seemingly marvelous successes, and the favor they have found, they have been uniformly condemned as productive of more harm than good in the long run, and the churches have been constrained to forbid their service. This will be sufficiently noted before I have done.

If these "Evangelists" were early put under the restraints of a frequent examination as to "their knowledge and piety, and motives in seeking the work of the gospel ministry;" if they were made to promise "subjection to their brethren in the Lord;" if they were required to adopt a "form of sound words," so that all would understand their doctrinal views, and the scope of their preaching; if they were "ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery," doubtless their peculiar power would be broken. They would then come under the style and regimen of God's authorized ministers, and find their just level among them. This is freely admitted, and the inquiry is suggested, Is there scriptural authority for any such independent ministry in the church? Are men or women at liberty, under the revealed method of the administration of God's kingdom, to take upon themselves the office and work implied in this Lay Evangelism? They are self-sent, self-licensed, self-ordained; and by this latter expression is not intended any mystical spiritual gift, any "indelible mark" put upon the person, but, in the words of the Scotch "Book," "ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some public church office." They are irresponsible to any ecclesiastical power. They are without even "letters missive" from any church, or session, or Presbytery, or council, authorizing them to preach within their jurisdiction. They carry no credentials; they have no commission whatever to show from any denomination or party in or out of the church. Is not this an anomaly in the church of God?

Is there not a deep peril to the church and to souls lurking in the *principle* and *practice* of such Evangelism? If happy results seemingly attend the earliest in the field, have we any assurance that such results will follow all or most of their successors? Will all be equally wise, equally Calvinistic, equally evangelical? And what must be the effect upon the constituted churches of Christ? How much censoriousness, and fault-finding, and unjust measurements of the pastors will there be? And what claims may not be asserted by those who have the gift of talk, to usurp authority, and thus depreciate and degrade God's own ministry in their place and power? There will be "itching ears," desires for novelties and excitements, dissatisfaction with the ordinary and relatively dull and dry work of the church. Their very presence creates a diversion and scattering of power: and when they are gone, there will come a halting in work, and a waiting for the recurrence and return of something of the same or similar sort. And who can tell the effect upon the stated ministry, who work year in and year out in the same place, of such exceptional and popular utterances, as those of these Evangelists must be? No one imagines that they can continue long in a given locality. They have not the mental training or furniture for more than a limited period of preaching. How many of the ordained abiding ministers are there who would not suffer, often seriously suffer, by the comparisons made between their regular and stated sermons and those of these men, who are so racy, and earnest and telling, just because they are to continue for a short time? Many ministers have lost their pulpits or their influence by reason of these very things under the labors of itinerary *ordained* Evangelists; and the verdict of the church at home and abroad is against them, and in favor of the assistance of neighboring settled *pastors* in times of revival.

The ministry has long been regarded as a sacred—as *the* sacred profession, commanding respect as the "high calling" of God in His service. And theology has been regarded as a sacred science,

the "science of sciences," the queen of them all. Education, culture, training, have been deemed essential, and the best minds of the church have felt the need of elevating the standard of preparation and fitness. But now, unprofessional men, "novices," who know little or nothing of theology, but who have facility of utterance, are accounted practically superior to the ministry in their chief work, the preaching of the gospel; and with no small *eclat* are accredited to the people by ministers themselves, as special conveyancers of divine influence, favorites of the Holy Ghost, to whom the people are led to look for the divine blessing in the salvation of souls, and for whose advent they will (if the thing goes on) more and more come to wait during certain seasons of the year; and thus church-work, as I have said, will be neglected, and the ministry of Reconciliation depreciated, and Lay Evangelism exalted; and God's own ordinances for the building up of His church and the salvation of men, through parents, pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, and the sacraments, be overshadowed. This, historically, has been the course of the thing; this is its logical legitimate tendency. To me the movement is sad—very sad. Of course it will be arrested; it can not abide; but as hitherto, so now, if it much extends, it will require years to clear away the wrecks and recover lost ground.

The preaching of the Word is a solemn and sacred business, the most so of any upon the earth, and it is committed by God, not to "novices," but to "faithful men," who perpetuate their office under the regulations of the Head of the Church. "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." "Even Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest," but was appointed and ordained of God. He is not allowed to be the judge of his own qualifications, or of his own call. It will not do for him to claim, as Davenport did before the Ecclesiastical Council, "some impression upon his mind, which he took to be a command from the Holy Ghost," which he interpreted to be

“the Lord sent me.” In those days it was held by some, and ministers protested against the doctrine, “that no other call is necessary to a person undertaking to preach the gospel, but his being a true Christian, and having an inward motion of the spirit, or a persuasion in his own mind that it is the will of God that he should preach and perform ministerial acts;” the consequence of which is, as the protesting association declared, “that there is no standing instituted ministry in the Christian Church which may be known by the *visible laws* of Christ’s kingdom.”

The preacher of the gospel is a man whose supposed inward call and whose qualifications must be tried and approved by competent church authorities; and he must be sent forth in the name of Christ, but ever held amenable and responsible to proper church courts. In this all the Christian denominations are agreed. God has hedged about this sacred business, and guarded it and put checks and restraints upon those who are employed in it. He has done this for the security and safety of His people, for sound doctrine and order in His kingdom. The scriptural argument on this matter, from the Old and New Testaments, especially from the Acts, and the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, I need not repeat—a reference to our text-books and seminary instruction will settle the point. The New Testament recognizes no irresponsible ministry of any kind in the church. The Seventy, the Twelve, Deacons, Evangelists, Elders, Presbyters, Bishops, all New Testament Ministers, were set apart by competent authority for their work. They were not independent men, cut loose from all direct responsibility to that appointing and ordaining power, but held amenable to it. *Order* is heaven’s first law. God is a God of order, and not of confusion. Every thing in the church must be done “in good form and order.”

Nor do the standards of the Presbyterian Church know of any such ministry as that of irresponsible Lay Evangelists. We do not even license men simply to preach the gospel—for licensure involves only this function—without previous careful preparation and ex-

amination. Hear the language of our Form of Government: "The Holy Scriptures require that some trial be previously had of them who are to be ordained to the ministry of the gospel, that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men, and that the churches may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the talents of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed. For this purpose presbyteries shall license probationers to preach the gospel, that after a competent trial of their talents, and receiving from the churches a good report, they may, in due time, ordain them to the sacred office:" then the course of the presbytery in this matter is given in minute detail. But Lay Evangelists preach without ordination, without license, without trial; and they come right into the fields where stated ministers and organized churches abound and set themselves up, or perhaps, I should say, are set up, to discharge the very highest functions of the gospel ministry. As the Apostle says, "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel."

As early as 1710, the General Assembly thus set forth its views on this subject: "Upon information that David Evan, a lay person, had taken upon him publicly to teach and preach among the Welsh, in the great valley, Chester county, it was *unanimously* agreed that the said Evan had done very ill, and acted irregularly in thus *invading* the work of the ministry, and was thereupon censured.

"Agreed, that the most proper method for advancing David Evan in necessary literature, to prepare him for the work of the ministry, is, that he lay aside all other business for a twelve month, and apply himself closely to learning and study."

In 1832, when there were no divisions in the Presbyterian Church, when old and new schools, north and south, were one, the General Assembly uttered these words in the ears of all the churches, "*Listen to no self-sent, irregular preachers, whatever may be their pretensions to knowledge, piety and zeal.*"

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in Edin-

burgh, A. D. 1800, referring to this same class of preachers, made the following deliverance: Hitherto, Brethren, you have regarded a regular standing ministry as a divine institution. You have been taught that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not act in a public character, without both producing and proving a heavenly commission; that the extraordinary endowments which He conferred upon His Apostles, were their warrant for appearing as the preachers of His religion, and that the evident connection between those endowments and the appointment of the first ministers of the word, is a direction to Christians, in all succeeding ages, to consider the office of public teacher as a divine ordinance, the exercise of which requires talents corresponding to the importance and difficulty of the charge. You know that the Church of Scotland, in conformity to these principles, prescribes a long course of education to those who are trained for the holy ministry. But this care and solicitude concerning the ministry of the word, which we and our fathers learned from Scripture, is now ridiculed as unnecessary. Men who assume to themselves the character of missionaries of the gospel, declare that every man has a right to preach the gospel, and they are now traversing the whole country as "Evangelists," without any sort of authority, without giving any public pledge for the soundness of their faith, for the correctness of their morals, and without the advantages of that regular education and preparatory knowledge, which, under every form of the Christian Church, ever since the age of miraculous gifts, have been held as indispensably necessary for the discharge of the gospel ministry. \* \* \*

Whatever may be the intentions of some who have engaged in this, the manifest tendency is, to foster a blind and intemperate zeal, to unsettle the minds of many, to throw their principles loose, and to make them become like "clouds without water, carried about of winds."

Beware, then, Brethren, of these self-authorized teachers. Persevere in the principles in which you have been bred. They who

“heap to themselves teachers having itching ears” wander into new paths which lead them to dangerous snares and errors. We speak as to wise men. Judge ye what we say. “Stand in the ways and and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.”

On this deliverance the Church of Scotland has rested ever since it was made. And if now, as then, irresponsible, self-sent preachers have their day, the assembly will yet reiterate her old decision and warn the churches against them.

The most signal test which the American Church has ever had on this subject, was during the mighty revival in New England under Whitfield, Edwards and others. The results are matters of history. Amid many differences in regard to that work, all were agreed in respect to the matter now before us. The Rev. Jonathan Parsons, of Lyme, in his sermon, “needful caution in a critical time,” from Titus ii: 8, says:

“Know you not that the present circumstances of the Church of Christ, and the threatening aspect over it, do eminently call upon me, and all others that long for the prosperity of Jerusalem, to use great plainness of speech and holy vigilance? Especially in some of our towns, where God has shed abroad his love in the hearts of many; and so even with us, the glory of the Lord is evidently departing, and human passions and unhallowed measures seem to be taking its place.” Then he exhorts them, as a means “to recover the poor church from its wounds, and to prevent its being stabbed to death,” to avoid several errors which he specifies. “1. Give no countenance to men’s setting themselves up as the public teachers of the church.” Brotherly exhortation with becoming modesty, he approves, and urges as a duty; but not that laymen should set themselves up as teachers, *and appoint meetings over which they are to preside, and in which they are to teach, like ministers.* This, he contends, is unscriptural; and no fancied ability, or desire to do good, or hope or *supposed experience of usefulness*, can justify them in



attempting to do good, by breaking the command of God. *Great Awakening*, pp. 148-9.

In the election sermon of the Rev. Nathan Appleton, in 1743, addressed to the legislature of Massachusetts, says: "Among the many things at this day that have a plausible appearance at first view, and yet are of a dangerous tendency, is this encouraging illiterate persons publicly to exhort, who, by speaking freely and boldly *upon some points*, lead the people to think they have more of the spirit of God than their ministers." A very significant and important statement—a statement which the Associated Ministers of the county of Wyndham corroborated in a letter to their people, Dec., 1744, in which they say, that those who followed after lay preachers claimed "that at the meetings of lay preaching and exhorting they have more of the presence of God than in His ordinances, and under the present ministry, and the administration of the ordinances in these churches." The associated ministers of Boston and Charlestown, in the case of the Rev. Mr. Davenport and his lay exhorters, said: "We judge that the Rev. Mr. Davenport has not acted prudently, but to the disservice of religion by \* \* \* encouraging private brethren to pray and exhort in larger or smaller assemblies of people *gathered for that purpose*—a practice which we fear may be found big with errors, irregularities, and mischief."—*G. A.*, p. 242.

The following is from the testimony of the pastors in Massachusetts Bay, in 1743: "Private persons, of no education, and but low attainments in knowledge and the great doctrines of the gospel, under pretense of exhorting, taking upon themselves to be preachers of the Word of God, we judge to be a *heinous invasion of the ministerial office, offensive to God, and destructive of these churches*."

The ordaining and separating of any persons to the work of the ministry at large, and without any relation to a particular charge, which some of late have unhappily gone into, we look upon as contrary to the Scriptures, and directly opposite to our platform and the practice of the Protestant churches.

The spirit and practice of separation from the particular flocks to which persons belong to join themselves and support lay exhorters or itinerants, is very subversive of the churches of Christ, opposite to the rule of the gospel, utterly condemned by our platform, and contrary to their covenant engagements. And we earnestly advise all our brethren in the ministry, carefully to endeavor to preserve their churches pure in doctrine, discipline and manners, *and guard them against the intrusion of itinerants and exhorters*; to uphold a spirit of love toward one another and all men; which, together with their fervent prayers, will be the most likely means, under God, to promote the true religion of the holy Jesus, and hand it uncorrupt, to succeeding generations.”—*G. A.*, pp. 287-8.

And in the retractations of the Rev. Mr. Davenport upon a review of his <sup>own</sup> ~~cause~~, he says: “The articles which I especially refer to, and would in the most public manner retract, and warn others against, are ~~these~~ <sup>the</sup> which follow, viz.: \* \* 4. I believe, further, that I have done much hurt to religion, by encouraging private persons to a ministerial or authoritative kind or method of exhorting; which is particularly observable in many, such being much puffed up and falling into the snare of the devil, whilst many others are thus directly prejudiced against the work.”—*G. A.*, p. 255.

President Edwards, than whom no man more fully sympathized with the great revival, after discriminating carefully between what he calls “preaching,” which belongs to ministers, and “exhorting in a way of Christian conversation,” which belongs to laymen, says: “It will be a very dangerous thing for laymen to invade the office of a minister; if this be common among us, we shall be in danger of having a stop put to the Word of God, and the Ark’s being turned aside from us, before it comes to Mount Zion, and of God’s making a breach upon us; as of old, there was an unhappy stop put to the joy of the congregation of Israel in bringing up the Ark of God, because others carried it besides the Levites; and, therefore, David, when the error was found out, says: “None

ought to carry the Ark of God but the Levites only ; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the Ark of God, and to minister unto Him forever." And because one presumed to touch the Ark that was not of the sons of Aaron, therefore the Lord made a breach upon them, and covered their day of rejoicing with a cloud in His anger."—*Works*, vol. 3, pp. 339-40. Verily, it becomes us to seek God after "the due order."

Is it not wise for Presbyterians, who wish to have all things done "decently and in order," and for Presbyterian ministers who have solemnly promised "to study the peace, unity and purity" of the Church, to pause on the threshold of this movement, and settle the principle and law of the gospel ministry. The "only rule of faith and practice" in this matter is the Word of God. We may not appeal to our own feelings or fancies, to our views of expediency, to apparent good results, to the approval of certain clergymen, to our interpretations of Divine Providence, to the spirit of the age, to anything, against the revealed mind of God ; to the "law and to the testimony" we must go, and by them abide.

Let the ministry consider their own high and sacred office, and "magnify" that office, and by their consecration and fidelity make even the *appearance* of an intrusion into the divine order manifestly improper. If the ministry are unfaithful, unconsecrated, unacceptable to God's people, let the proper remedy be applied ; and we may rest assured that that remedy will not be found in the recognition and employment of another and unscriptural order of preachers. The sphere of laymen is distinct ; the sphere of the ministry is distinct ; and though at times the difference between the oral utterances of a gifted layman and those of a relatively feeble minister may be marked, and the temptation to instate the layman in the place of the minister be strong, yet it is better to accept God's ordained minister than any self-ordained layman. It is dangerous to change God's order, and invent or allow human methods to weaken His authority in His own kingdom. His word

to Jeremiah, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran;" I have not spoken unto them, yet they prophesied," should, it seems to me, make us tremble to give any unlicensed, unordained, irresponsible men our countenance and support in their public preaching of the gospel.

There are a few texts in the Scripture which are sometimes quoted in defense of this new practice: that concerning Eldad and Medad—that in St. John, we saw one casting out devils, etc., the command let him that heareth, say come—the preaching of the scattered members of the church at Jerusalem, and the like. But in the face of the vivid, clear, outstanding fact of the divine order of the Christian ministry, whose sacred office may not be invaded or their functions usurped, and of the plain meaning of these passages in themselves and in their context, I do not suppose any educated student of the Bible can, soberly and intelligently, use them in the manner indicated. No accepted master in Israel, in the range of my library, has ever had the least difficulty with them.

It is from no conscious motive of envy or jealousy of the supposed or real gifts and powers of any Lay Evangelist that I speak as I do. I think I can truly say with Moses, concerning Eldad and Medad, "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets;" but I must add with Moses, "and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them." If these men were only set apart as were these two Jews; if the Spirit of God in the luminous cloud of the Shekinah should come down upon them, and ordain and commission them, as He did Eldad and Medad—or if, seeing the days of miracles are past, and we live in the times of church order and jurisdiction under the New Testament revelations, if they were tested and approved, and licensed and set apart to the public preaching of the gospel by "the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery," I would be the last one to stand in the way of their largest usefulness.

Nor would I, in affirming the high and sacred functions of the ministry, lower the scriptural standard of lay agency, of lay work in the Church of God. Though laymen may not invade the office of the ministry, there is a vast amount of service for them to perform. There is what President Edwards calls "exhorting in a way of Christian conversation;" and if any wish to read a most pertinent setting forth of the distinction here implied, and how far laymen can safely go in this direction, I would refer them to the third volume of his works, pp. 397-401. Every Christian has a divine warrant to say to his neighbor, "know the Lord," and he that heareth may and ought "to say, come." And Sabbath school work and Bible class instruction, in which teachers are all under responsibility for their teaching; these, and many other things, needless to mention, are all in the province of laymen.

Nor may I be justly charged with "troubling Israel." I am simply standing on New Testament order and holding fast to the constitution of the Presbyterian Church and the decisions of her Supreme Court. I can not cast aside and disregard the teachings of history and the concurrent testimony of the Fathers of the churches. I am doing what I may, to preserve the peace and unity and purity of the church in accordance with my covenant engagements. I am not innovating upon its usages, nor contravening its spirit or its letter. The charge of disorder, or of introducing novelties can not be laid at my door.

I am firmly persuaded that what our churches of this day need, is not a diversion from their specific objects as churches, a scattering and division of power on union efforts, so called, on passing popular excitements of any kind, but a rest from these things, and a concentration of attention and force, of prayer and labor in the line of our distinct vocation and mission as churches; we need a pressing home of covenanted duties and privileges. By such a course, there will, in the end, be more true union, more brotherly love and mutual respect, more of a holy emulation in the service of the

Master, less of perplexing and exasperating discussions, and wiser, more thorough participation in those organized efforts in which the various denominations are interested through responsible agencies. A proper denominational *esprit du corps* is essential to the advancement of the Catholic Christian Church at large. That church grows and becomes more deeply rooted and powerful by the prosperity of its various parts. This, to my mind, is a self-evident proposition.

In view of the present state of things, is not the call for and wide acceptance of unlicensed, unordained, irresponsible preachers, who, to say the least, are treading upon very doubtful and dangerous ground, a dark sign for the ministry? Should it not stir us to the profoundest self-examination and searchings of heart, and cast us in the dust of humiliation before God? Here are we, the ordained ministers of Jesus Christ, the regularly constituted and accredited ambassadors of God, commissioned according to His own regulations to preach the Word, to do this with "all authority" in the name and stead of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that whoever receiveth us receiveth Him that sent us. We hold "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" in our hands. We have the *covenanted* prayers and sympathies of the Church. We have Sabbath schools and great power with the rising generation; we have magnificent opportunities, and we have the Throne of God behind us.

And just in proportion as we appreciate our own failure, and feel the need of outside unordained help in preaching the gospel, just in proportion as God's revealed method seems insufficient, and human inventions are deemed necessary to supplement it; just in so far we turn from our sacred office and surrender its functions to others not lawfully called thereunto—but I will not press this line of thought to its logical conclusion.

A minister preaching the Word of Reconciliation is God's ambassador, which a layman is not; he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, which a layman is not. His dignity, power and authority are more than regal, more than imperial.

My brethren, if we only duly magnified our office and made full proof of our ministry ; if we were examples to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity ; if we gave attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, neglecting not the gift given us with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, taking heed to ourselves and to the doctrine, continuing in them, giving ourselves wholly to them, absorbed in the ministry of the Word and prayer, being instant in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, with all long suffering and doctrine, there would be no place found for unauthorized, irresponsible Lay Evangelists in the churches of God under our care.





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